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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI (TROBERTS), NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY), NEA/P
(FFINVER), IIP/G/NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: OMAN ONLINE: U.S. BEHIND ARRESTS; HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT
HYPOCRISY

1. Summary: The Omani Internet chat rooms "Al-Sablah" and "Al-Majarra" are the liveliest and most comprehensive Arabic-language fora for political and social discourse in the country, touching on issues and personalities rarely addressed in the conventional media. While not totally free, nor wholly reflective of Omani public opinion, these popular sites nevertheless offer a worthwhile window into the hot topics and unvarnished views of the day. This edition of Oman Online contains the following topics:

-- U.S. Behind Arrests in Oman
-- U.S. Human Rights Report

End summary.

Blaming the U.S.

2. Al-Sablah subscribers have been speculating about whether the United States is involved in the arrest of detainees accused of plotting to harm Oman's national security. Most participants rejected this notion. One subscriber wrote, "You overestimate the capabilities of American intelligence services. If they were as good as people think they are, they would have prevented the September 11 attacks." A small number of subscribers gave credence to the idea. "The CIA is gathering information about Muslim activists in Arab countries and some nations will do anything to appease them. I am certain this is the case here." Another participant suggested that visits by the American Ambassador to cultural institutions could have intelligence aims. "It's strange that the U.S. Ambassador should suddenly visit insignificant cultural institutions. Could his visits be tied to this issue?" Al-Majarra also discussed possible American involvement in the arrests. The vast majority of its subscribers opined that the U.S. is involved in the arrests. One Al-Majarra participant wrote, "Of course America is involved, the U.S. interferes with everything in this country."

U.S. Criticism

3. An Al-Sablah subscriber posted a link to the web page of the State Department's Human Rights Report stating, "Washington is criticizing Oman's human rights practices because of the government's decision to ban journalists." One participant stated, "It's strange that the U.S. should criticize Oman, one of its strongest allies, on an issue that only involves a few individuals." Another subscriber commented, "The U.S. does not care what the governments of its allies think or how they react to its statements. America learned long ago that Arab countries will not stand up to it."

BALTIMORE